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ABSTRACT

Although several studies have documented the benefits to undergraduate college students of participating in service-learning and general community service, little research has examined the effects of such service participation on the service-related attitudes and behaviors of alumni. In this study, 481 alumni of a religious-affiliated liberal arts college participated in a phone survey that examined their past and present behaviors related to service and their current service-related attitudes. Results show that participation in both general community service and service-learning as undergraduates positively predicted alumni attitudes toward social and personal responsibility, as well as alumni involvement in postcollege community service and in service-related careers. In addition, service-learning participation exerted an effect over and above that accounted for by community service participation, although effect sizes were relatively small. Additional research is needed to examine the aspects of service-learning and general community services experiences, and other factors related to college life, that contribute to young adults' service-related attitudes and behaviors. (Author/SLD)

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Distinguishing Attitudinal and Behavioral Differences among College Alumni who Participated in Service-Learning and Volunteer Service

ED 478 840

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Abstract

Although several studies have documented the benefits to undergraduate college students of participating in service-learning and general community service, little research has examined the effects of such service participation on the service-related attitudes and behaviors of alumni. In the present study, 481 alumni of a religious-affiliated liberal arts college participated in a phone survey that examined their present and past behaviors related to service and their current service-related attitudes. Results showed that participation in both general community service and service-learning as undergraduates positively predicted alumni attitudes toward social and personal responsibility, as well as alumni involvement in post-college community service and in service-related careers. In addition, service-learning participation exerted an effect over and above that accounted for by community service participation, although effect sizes were relatively small. Additional research is needed to examine what aspects of service-learning and general community service experiences, as well other factors related to college life, contribute to young adults' service-related attitudes and behaviors.

Distinguishing Attitudinal and Behavioral Differences among College Alumni who Participated in Service-Learning and Volunteer Service

Several studies have documented the positive effects of participating in community service and service-learning for college undergraduates who become involved in service activities (Astin & Sax, 1998; Fenzel & Leary, 1997; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). Among the benefits acknowledged by researchers are gains in students' attitudes toward civic responsibility, academic skills, and leadership participation and development. In addition, Astin and Sax (1998) found that involvement in service-learning was related to increases in students' commitment to serving the community and plans to participate in service in the future. Also, theorists (e.g., McEwen, 1996) suggest that college students can realize substantial developmental benefits in the cognitive and psychosocial spheres from carefully constructed service-learning programs. Contact with and support from faculty in service-learning may be an important contributor to these benefits (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

Some work (e.g., Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000) has shown also that in many ways participants in service as part of requirements of an academic course benefit more than do students who participate in service not related to their academic program. For example, Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), in a large study of several thousand students at different colleges and universities across the U.S., found that service-learning participation was a stronger predictor of students' preference to engage in a service-related career, students' academic performance, and students' academic writing skills than was participation in what the authors called *generic* community service-community--service not conducted as part of an academic course. The authors suggested that the students' expression of a desire to be

employed in a service-based career after graduation indicated a particularly strong finding because of the strong commitment to service that such a choice manifests.

While these and other studies have examined the benefits to students from service-learning and community service participation during their undergraduate years, few if any studies have examined how students' service experiences continue to benefit or affect them after they have left college. The present study, then, examined: (a) the extent to which college alumni who participated in service-learning and general community service as undergraduate students continued to be involved in service one to six years after graduation; and (b) the extent to which service-learning and community service make unique contributions to alumni's levels of community service participation and attitudes toward social and personal responsibility

Method

Participants

Two groups of alumni of an east coast Jesuit Catholic liberal arts college were chosen for a phone survey for the study during the fall of 2000. The first group of 92 alumni was comprised of individuals who graduated between 1992 and 1999, were identified by either professors or the students' academic transcripts as having completed an undergraduate service-learning course, and for whom working phone numbers could be found. The second group was a random sample of 1016 alumni of the college who graduated between 1995 and 1999 and for whom correct working phone numbers could be found. A total of 531 random sample members and 42 service-learning sample members could not be reached after five phone attempts, and only 52 members of the random sample and two of the service-learning sample refused to participate. The final sample size was 480 participants, 48 of whom were among the identified service-learning sample.

Following the research of Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), service-learning (S-L) alumni in the present study were identified as those individuals who indicated in the phone survey that they had taken at least one undergraduate service-learning course (N=196) and non-service-learning (nS-L) alumni were identified as those who gave a negative answer to the question (N=284). Some of the S-L and nS-L alumni may have participated in community service outside of any required course service. Community (generic) service (CS) alumni, in a manner different from that used by Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), were identified as those alumni who indicated that they participated in any community service in college outside of that required as part of a course (N=314) and non-community service alumni (nCS) were those who indicated that they did not participate in any type of non-course-related service in college (N=166). Similar to that reported by Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), there was some overlap in alumni who were among the S-L and CS groups (N=182). Also, 63 alumni (13%) reported having participated in neither generic community service or service-learning.

Among the S-L alumni 57% were women and for the nS-L group 65% were women. Also, 90% of S-L alumni and 92% of nS-L alumni identified themselves as White or Caucasian in race or ethnicity. With respect to current employment, 33% of S-L alumni and 45% of nS-L alumni reported holding a *corporate* type job. *Education* was the form of employment for 30% of S-L alumni and 15% of nS-L alumni. In addition, 51% of S-L alumni and 39% of nS-L alumni were employed in a service-related field (education, non-profit, government, health care, or social work). Demographic indicators for community service participants (CS) and non-participants (nCS) were similar to those for service-learning alumni with respect to race/ethnicity (92% of CS and 88% of nCS were white) and gender (64% of CS and 56% of nCS alumni were women). In addition, 53% of CS alumni and 33% of nCS alumni were

employed in a service-related field, with a majority of those jobs being in education (29% of CS and 15% of nCS alumni). Overall, 79% of the sample reported their religious affiliation as Catholic.

With respect to participation in general community service, 64% of the S-L alumni and 68% of nS-L alumni indicated that they participated in some community service as undergraduates that was not required as part of a course. Only 13% of the sample did not participate in either service-learning or general community service as undergraduates.

Materials

Items for the alumni phone survey were developed by the Loyola College Center for Social and Community Research which has considerable experience and expertise in preparing and conducting phone surveys. Although most variables used in the present study are represented by single items, many of which are dichotomous, some scales were constructed comprised of several items. For example, seven items comprised a measure of perceived personal responsibility toward improving the well-being of people and communities in need (alpha=.80), ten items comprised a scale of perceived responsibility of the community or society to improve the well-being of people in need (alpha=.76), and a 4-item scale assessed the importance people placed on becoming involved in political or social action (alpha=.82). All of the items on these subscales included a 5-point Likert-type response format, indicating the extent to which the respondent agreed or disagreed with the statement. The number of hours per week alumni spent during the previous 12 months *performing volunteer/community service work* was assessed by a single item with a 5-point scale (responses ranged from *1 or less* [value of 1] to *more than 20* [value of 5]) and treated as a categorical variable in the analyses.

Sample items assessing personal responsibility include: "It is important to me personally to give time for the good of the community," and "My problems are too large for me to give time to helping others" (reversed scored). Social responsibility items included: "Communities should provide social services to their members in need," and "We should create programs to address specific social problems." Two items on the political and social action subscale included: "It is important to me personally to influence the political structure," and "It is important to me personally to participate in advocacy or political action groups."

Analyses and Results

With respect to the first research question regarding the extent to which college alumni who participated in service-learning and community service as undergraduate students continued to be involved in service one to six years after graduation, several chi-square tests were conducted. These results, presented in Table 1, showed that, compared to alumni who did not participate in service-learning as undergraduates, S-L alumni were more likely to have participated in community service during the past year (64% vs. 45%), $X^2(1) = 4.36$, p=.037, although there was no significant between-group difference with respect to the number of hours per week spent working in community service over the previous 12 months (48% of S-L alumni vs. 41% on nS-L alumni spending 2 or more hours). In addition, S-L alumni were more likely than nS-L alumni to currently hold a job in a service-related field (51% vs. 39%), $X^2(1) = 6.00$, p=.014. Similarly, alumni who reported having performed at least some community service in college not connected to a course (CS), as compared to those alumni who performed no such service (nCS), were more likely to report having participated in community service during the past year (68% vs. 45%), $X^2(1) = 22.60$, $p<.001$, to currently hold a job in a service-related field (53% vs. 33%), $X^2(1) = 13.18$, $p<.001$, to have participated in an immersion

service experience as alumni (9.3% vs. 0.02%), $X^2(1) = 9.55$, p=.002, and to be a member of a community organization (36% vs. 24%), $X^2(1) = 7.22$, p=.007,.

To examine the second research question regarding the unique contributions of having participated in service-learning and non-course-related community service to social justice attitudes and service behaviors exhibited as alumni, multiple regression or multivariate logistic analyses were conducted. This analytical approach is similar to that used by Vogelgesang and Astin (2000).

In regression analyses, participating in service-learning was a significant predictor of attitudes toward both personal responsibility and community responsibility for improving the welfare of others in both the univariate regression and when participation in general community service was added to the regression equation. (See Table 2.) The relation between service-learning participation and the importance of personal political involvement approached significance in both types of analyses, while participating in other community service served as a significant predictor (also shown in Table 2).

In logistic regression (simultaneous) analyses (see Table 3), examining whether alumni were currently involved in a service oriented job, both undergraduate service-learning participation, R^2=.02, $F(1,371)$=7.01, p=.008, and participation in general community service, R^2 Change=.04, $F(1,371)$=14.80, p<.001, were significant predictors. Similar findings applied to whether alumni had participated in any community service during the past year, R^2=.01, $F(1,371)$=5.65, p=.033, for participation in service-learning, and, R^2 Change=.05, $F(1,371)$=24.69, p<.001, for participation in general community service. Participating in general service, R^2 =.02, $F(1,371)$=7.66, p=.007, but not service-learning, R^2<.01, $F(1,371)$=1.25, p>.05, predicted current involvement in a community organization.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that involvement in both general community service and in service-learning as undergraduate students has some relatively long-term effects with respect to alumni attitudes and behaviors related to continued service and community involvement. In addition, results showed that participating in undergraduate service-learning has a significant effect over and above the effect that participating in general community service has on alumni's attitudes toward one's own and society's responsibility for improving the welfare of disadvantaged individuals and communities and on their continued service to communities. These effects are similar to those found by Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) among late adolescents and young adults during their undergraduate years.

Similarly, results showed that both general community service participation and service-learning participation make independent contributions to the continued involvement of alumni in community service and to the actual career choices made by alumni. For example, while alumni who, as undergraduates, participated in at least some general community service were more likely to have chosen a career in a service-related field (such as education, health care, social work, non-profit), having participated in service-learning exerted an additional effect on such a choice.

The present study makes two important contributions to the field of service-learning and community service research that extend the work of Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) and others. The first is the finding that participating in either general community service or service-learning in college can have long-term positive effects on young adults' attitudes toward social and personally responsibility and continued service involvement. The second contribution is the finding that, with respect to some service attitudes and behaviors, there is often an additional

effect from having participated in service-learning in college, over and above the effect that previous community service experience may have. The present study shows that these effects can may extend for at least 1 to 6 years after college graduation at a time when the alumni must be more proactive in becoming involved in service to their communities than when they were undergraduates. Also important to point out is that both *attitudes* toward one' own and society's responsibility to assist those in need, as well as *behaviors* that show real personal commitment to serving, are affected by undergraduate service experiences.

We must acknowledge, however, that the effect sizes for both service-learning and general community service participation are relatively small, leaving considerable variation in service attitudes and behaviors left to be explained by other factors. The present study might be improved by implementing some statistical controls that could account for some of the reasons why college students might engage in service as well as for students' attitudes toward social and personal responsibility prior to their college entry. Nevertheless, general community service participation in college does serve as a control for the examination of the relationship between service-learning participation and the attitudes and behaviors examined in this study.

Still, more research must be conducted to identify the components of a service-learning experience that have the strongest effects on the attitudes and behaviors of students and alumni, as well as on other aspects of the college and post-college experience that affect these young adult attitudes and behaviors. One such aspect might be the kinds of courses and speakers made available to young people in college, especially considering that the alumni sampled in the present study attended a religious-affiliated liberal arts college that requires students to take courses in theology, philosophy, and ethics. The quality of the service-learning courses taken

by students, including the amount of time devoted to preparation, reflection, and evaluation related to the service, should also be investigated (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).

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Table 1

Zero-order Relationships between types of undergraduate service and post graduation service activity

	Service-Learning Versus No Service-Learning	Community Service Versus No Community Service
Performed Any Service in Past Year	$X^2(1) = 4.36^*$	$X^2(1) = 22.60^{***}$
N of Hours of Service Past 12 months	$X^2(3) = 2.80$	$X^2(3) = 2.40$
Participated in Service Immersion in Past Year	$X^2(1) = 3.56+$	$X^2(1) = 9.55^{**}$
Currently Holds Job in Community Service Field	$X^2(1) = 6.00^*$	$X^2(1) = 13.18^{***}$
Currently Involved in a Community Organization	$X^2(1) = .21$	$X^2(1) = 7.22^{**}$

Note: All p-values are 2-tailed

$+ p < .10$ $^* p < .05$ $^{**} p < .01$ $^{***} p < .001$

Table 2

Results of regression analyses predicting attitudes toward personal and community responsibility and importance of political involvement.

Criterion = Attitude toward Personal Responsibility

Predictor	R^2 Change	*Beta*	*F*
Step 1:			
Part. in service-learning	.01	.09	4.18*
Step 2 (Simultaneous regression):			
Part. in service-learning		.10	5.54*
Part. in other service	.07	.27	36.57***

Criterion = Attitude toward Community Responsibility

Predictor	R^2 Change	*Beta*	*F*
Step 1:			
Part. in service-learning	.02	.14	9.21**
Step 2 (Simultaneous regression):			
Part. in service-learning		.14	10.17**
Part. in other service	.04	.19	18.12***

Criterion = Attitude toward Importance of Personal Political Involvement

Predictor	R^2 Change	*Beta*	*F*
Step 1:			
Part. in service-learning	.01	.08	3.00+
Step 2 (Simultaneous regression):			
Part. in service-learning		.08	2.85+
Part. in other service	.02	.13	8.39**

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 3

Results of Regression Analyses Predicting Current Employment in Service-Related Job, Participation in Any Community Service Past Year, and Current Involvement in Community Organization

Criterion = Currently Employed in Service-Related Job (N=373)

Predictor	R^2 Change	*Beta*	*F*
Step 1:			
Part. in service-learning	.02	.12	5.81*
Step 2 (Simultaneous regression):			
Part. in service-learning		.13	7.01*
Part. in other service	.04	.20	14.80***

Criterion = Participated in Any Community Service Past Year

Predictor	R^2 Change	*Beta*	*F*
Step 1:			
Part. in service-learning	.01	.10	4.57*
Step 2 (Simultaneous regression):			
Part. in service-learning		.11	5.65**
Part. in other service	.05	.22	24.69***

Criterion = Current Involvement in Community Organization

Predictor	R^2 Change	*Beta*	*F*
Step 1:			
Part. in service-learning	<.01	.05	.97
Step 2 (Simultaneous regression):			
Part. in service-learning		.06	1.25
Part. in other service	.02	.13	7.66**

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

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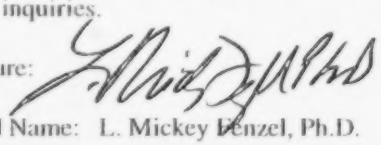
Signature: 

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